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An Illinois congressman has demanded the probe of a Gaza Strip university following a revelation that USAID helped fund it. U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, the ranking member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, made his request in an open letter to the U.S. Inspector General's office last Friday, shortly after State Department officials insisted that the institutions that received some \$140,000 from USAID "are independent universities and it would be incorrect to characterize them as Hamas-controlled."

Kirk, a Republican, said this was a mischaracterization "in light of the facts surrounding Islamic University in Gaza." He cited the lectureship of Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi and his widow, Jamila Shanti, herself a high-ranking Hamas official. He quoted Jameela El Shanty, professor and Hamas lawmaker, as telling the Baltimore Sun in 2006, "Hamas built this institution. The university presents the philosophy of Hamas."

Last month, Kirk continued, Fatah forces "raided a Hamas base at the university, reportedly confiscating 2,000 AK-47 rifles, hundreds of RPG launchers and ammunition. Senior Palestinian sources told ... Yediot Achronot that kidnapped Israel soldier Gilad Shalit had been kept at the Islamic University for most of 2006."

Kirk suggested that, in addition to the probe of the university, anti-terrorism vetting procedures be reexamined.